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Item 101 (e) of the preliminary list*
Environment and sustainable development: implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa

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Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 53/191 of 15 December 1998, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report to it at its fifty-fourth session on the outcome of the second session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa, as well as on measures adopted by the Conference at that session.

II. Implementation of General Assembly resolution 53/191

A. Arrangements for the headquarters of the Permanent Secretariat

2. Further to the signing by the Government of Germany, the Secretary-General and the Convention secretariat on 18 August 1998, the Government of Germany issued an ordinance, which became effective on 23 October 1998, implementing major parts of the headquarters agreement under German law, and on 18 August 1998 Germany ratified the headquarters agreement.

B. Global Mechanism

3. While recognizing the role of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) in selecting and appointing the Managing Director of the Global Mechanism as well as in establishing the framework for a separate identity for the Global Mechanism, the Conference of the Parties noted with concern that the Global Mechanism did not start operating on 1 January 1998 as requested by the Conference of the Parties at its first session.[1]

4. The Managing Director of the Global Mechanism presented the first draft of the operational strategy of the Global Mechanism. The Conference of the Parties took note

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of the draft and requested the Managing Director to complete the development of an operational strategy so as to ensure full consideration of all its main functions, including mobilizing and channelling financial resources.

5. In this regard, the Conference of the Parties also requested the Convention secretariat and the Global Mechanism to cooperate in order to avoid duplication and to enhance the effectiveness of the implementation of the Convention in accordance with their respective roles as contained in the memorandum of understanding between the Conference of the Parties and IFAD regarding the modalities and administrative operation of the Global Mechanism.

6. The Conference of the Parties requested the Convention secretariat to continue consultations on the text of the draft of the memorandum of understanding in order to ensure that comments made by parties at the second session of the Conference of the Parties were taken into account, and to submit a revised draft of the memorandum of understanding for consideration and decision by the Conference of the Parties at its third session.

C. Additional regional implementation annex

7. Following the adoption by the General Assembly, at its fifty-third session, of resolution 53/191, the Conference of the Parties agreed to facilitate a consultative process for the elaboration of an additional regional implementation annex to the Convention for the countries of the Eastern and Central Europe region.

8. In this regard, countries of Eastern and Central Europe were invited to pursue consultations with a view to producing a draft additional regional implementation annex to the Convention for consideration by the Conference of the Parties at its third session.

D. Action by States

9. In paragraph 3 of resolution 53/191, the General Assembly called upon all countries that were not parties to the Convention to ratify or accede to the Convention as soon as possible.

10. As of 27 April 1999, instruments of ratification, acceptance, approval or accession had been deposited by the following 149 States and one regional economic integration organizations:

Afghanistan, Algeria, Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belgium, Belize, Benin, Bolivia, Botswana, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, Canada, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Chile, China, Comoros, Cook Islands, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Denmark, Djibouti, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, European Community, Fiji, Finland, France, Gabon, Gambia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Grenada, Guatemala, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kiribati, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lebanon, Lesotho, Liberia, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Malawi, Malaysia, Mali, Malta, Marshall Islands, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mexico, Micronesia (Federated States of), Monaco, Mongolia, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Namibia, Nauru, Nepal, Netherlands, Nicaragua, Niger, Nigeria, Niue, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Rwanda, Saint Lucia, Samoa, Sao Tome and Principe, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, South Africa, Spain, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Swaziland, Sweden, Switzerland, Syrian Arab Republic, Tajikistan, Togo, Tonga, Tunisia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Tuvalu, Uganda, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United Republic of Tanzania, Uruguay, Uzbekistan, Venezuela, Viet Nam, Yemen, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

III. Arrangements for the third session of the Conference of the Parties

11. The Conference of the Parties, in its decision 24/COP.2[2] accepted with gratitude the offer by the Government of Brazil to hold the third session of the Conference of the Parties in Recife from 15 to 26 November 1999.

12. The secretariat is conducting discussions with the Government of Brazil concerning the arrangements for that session. A host agreement with that Government will be signed in July 1999.

13. The annotated agenda for the third session of the Conference of the Parties is contained in document ICCD/COP (3)/1.

IV. Action requested of the General Assembly

14. The Conference of the Parties approved a revised core budget for the Convention for 1999, as the second year of the biennium 1998–1999, not including conference-servicing costs.

15. In its decision 3/COP.2,[2] the Conference of the Parties called on the General Assembly to decide to finance from the regular programme budget of the United Nations the conference-servicing costs arising from sessions of the Conference of the Parties and its subsidiary bodies for the duration of the institutional linkage approved by the General Assembly, including the fourth and fifth sessions of the Conference of the Parties and meetings of its subsidiary bodies, in the calendar of conferences and meetings for 2000–2001.

16. That request is hereby conveyed to the General Assembly, and the Assembly is invited to take further action thereon at its current session.

17. It is recalled that in its resolution 52/198 the General Assembly decided to include in the calendar of conferences and meetings for the biennium 1998–1999 the sessions of the Conference of the Parties and its subsidiary bodies. The servicing of those meetings was provided by the United Nations Office at Geneva at United Nations premises in Geneva during 1998 and in Bonn during 1999. The costs of the meetings were financed from the United Nations regular budget for the biennium 1998–1999.

18. It is the intention of the Secretariat to provide conference services to the Convention in the biennium 2000–2001 on a reimbursable basis, unless the General Assembly decides, at its fifty-fourth session, to endorse decision 3/COP.2 of the Conference of the Parties.

Notes

[1] ICCD/COP(1)/11/Add.1, decision 24/COP.1.

[2] See ICCD/COP(2)/14/Add.1.

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General Assembly
Economic and Social Council

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General Assembly
Fifty-fourth session
Items 12, 39 and 100 of the preliminary list*

Report of the Economic and Social Council

Support by the United Nations system of the efforts of Governments to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies

Sustainable development and international economic cooperation

Economic and Social Council
Substantive session of 1999
5–30 July 1999
Item 10 of the provisional agenda**

Regional cooperation

Letter dated 17 May 1999 from the Permanent Representative of Armenia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit to you herewith the text of the Yerevan Declaration on Decentralization (see annex) adopted at the international conference on the theme "Decentralization in Eastern and Central Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS): conditions of success", which was held from 26 to 28 April 1999, at Yerevan.

Elected representatives and government officials from more than 20 countries in the region, representing both local and central levels of government as well as a number of international organizations, met at Yerevan to exchange views on decentralization in their respective countries. The aim of the conference was to assist the countries of Eastern and Central Europe and the CIS in smoothing and accelerating the process of transition towards appropriate forms and degrees of decentralization. The participants of the conference noted the critical work of the United Nations in this regard, and requested the United Nations to continue to convene such regional forums, strengthen various institutions dealing with decentralization and develop exchange networks.

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** E/1999/100.

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I should be grateful if you would circulate this letter and its annex as an document of the General Assembly, under items 12, 39 and 100 of the preliminary list, and of the Economic and Social Council, under item 10 of the provisional agenda.

(*Signed*) Movses **Abelian**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

Annex

Yerevan Declaration on Decentralization

1. Elected representatives and government officials from both local and central levels of more than 20 countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) met at Yerevan to exchange views on the programme of decentralization in their respective countries.

2. The participants recognized the importance of decentralization in the process of democratization and transformation of the economy and society from the previous centralized and overpoliticized systems. At the same time, they underscored that successful decentralization policies required a strong and supported centre.

3. They stressed that although problems and challenges are common, solutions may vary from country to country according to specific social, economic and cultural peculiarities.

4. It was stressed that the Constitution and basic legislative texts should provide the legal framework for decentralization. A clear distribution of competencies between State administration and self-government, and within self-government between different levels, has to be organized. This clear distribution of competencies does not exclude cooperation between them.

5. It was underlined that a financial resource basis commensurate with the functions and responsibilities of various levels of government and self-government should be secured. An effort must be made to secure financial flows for the local authorities that broadly correspond to their particular needs, conditions and responsibilities. For this purpose, the development of institutional frameworks that encourage cooperation between central and local authorities and the enhancement of relevant skills are mandatory. Financial decentralization should stimulate and foster local responsibility and the use of resources for quality service delivery and socio-economic development. In the context of financial decentralization, appropriate mechanisms to ensure a fair equalization and distribution of resources should be adopted. At the same time, strong and efficient systems of accountability and control should be put into place.

6. To make decentralization successful, it should be accompanied by a wide range of measures for human resources development. These efforts should be aimed at both elected officials and administrative staff. Human resources development encompasses training activities, which target the refinement and reinforcement of knowledge, skills and ethical values, but also the promotion of organizational change. Conference discussions reflected the existence of broad generic needs in the areas of policy analysis; legislative drafting; human resource management; financial management; NGO resource management; entrepreneurial development; gender and environmental sensitivity training; and training for trainers. However, training cannot be effective if it is not properly integrated into and supported by coherent and consistent policies in recruitment, placement, motivation and career development.

7. Civil society and NGOs have a major role to play in decentralization and local government reform. Strong democracies need strong citizens. Citizen participation demands a culture that will prompt them to play their parts as stakeholders, partners in decision-making, standard-setters and evaluators of performance in local government. Citizen education on rights and responsibilities is an important element. There are examples of curriculum materials for citizenship education from countries at the conference. Citizens need to learn rights, but also their obligations as members of a nation and community.

8. The participants recognized that exchange of information, experiences and practices is a very useful tool to assist countries in the process of planning and implementing decentralization. This exchange could be greatly enhanced by maximizing the use of modern information technologies, encouraging distance learning, communication exchange and the sharing of ideas. By fostering the establishment and maintenance of information networks and clearing house facilities on a global and regional basis, the United Nations can play a critical role in the growth of virtual communities of practitioners and scholars dedicated to the purposes of decentralization, administrative reform, citizen participation and democratization.

9. The participants therefore requested the United Nations to continue to facilitate the ongoing dialogue on decentralization in countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the CIS by convening similar regional forums, developing exchange networks, and strengthening national regional and local institutions dealing with decentralization issues.

10. Finally, the participants expressed their heartfelt appreciation to the Parliament and Government of Armenia for hosting and organizing this conference and for the generous hospitality extended to all. They also conveyed their thanks to the United Nations, which through the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat and the United Nations Development Programme, strongly supported the organization of the conference.